

FLATHEAD COUNTY PLANNING TASK FORCE
Thursday, October 13, 2005
Earl Bennett Building
4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

<u>Members Present</u>	<u>Members Absent</u>	<u>Others</u>
Jed Fisher	Gary Hall	Bill Baum
Jeff Harris	Pam Kennedy	Mayre Flowers
Dennis Hester	Tom Jentz	Chris Ahner
Charlie Johnson	Myrt Webb	Doug Averill
Charles Lapp	Velvet Phillips-Sullivan	Don Hines
Mike Meehan	Diane Blend	
Joe Russell		
Marsha Sheffels		
Jim Patrick		
Bob Horne		
Bill Shaw		
Turner Askew		
Kerry Finley		
Jane Leivo		
Karen Reeves		
Richard Surynt		
Cris Coughlin		
Mike Pence		

Nix called the meeting to order

Agenda Approval

Reeves made a motion to approve the agenda, as presented. Surynt seconded the motion. All in favor.

Minutes Approval

Nix stated that both the Parks & Resource Committee and the Bike Path Committee need more members. He noted that members of these committees do not have to be members of the Task Force and he would take names from the general public. Nix added that the Affordable Housing could also use more members. The Planning Department does have the preliminary housing papers done, but they might have to be amended to include affordable housing.

Russell pointed out that the word “Evergreen” should be capitalized in the DNRC portion of the minutes. The minutes state that Charlie Johnson asked if the Road Department is responsible for plowing private roads in case of emergency. Clarification of this statement was requested. It was determined that Johnson was asking for some direction as to the legal and tactical response when these roads

should be plowed by the county in order for emergency vehicles to respond to an incident.

Shaw made a motion to approve the September minutes, as amended. Fisher seconded the motion. All in favor.

Transportation Committee Report

Nix stated that the committee discussed the need for the county to have a funding mechanism for construction and maintenance of roads. Cities can form a maintenance district but the county doesn't have the statutory ability to do this. Money needs to be made available not only for paving roads but for continual maintenance of the roads. A determination needs to be made as to who will maintain and care for these roads. No money is available right now. It will be necessary to go to the legislature and lobby for changes in the statute to allow a funding mechanism to construct, improve and maintain these county roads.

Nix added that impact fees are good, but these funds can only be used for improvement and construction, they can't be used for maintenance. MACo will support legislation in the next session.

Growth Policy Update

Harris stated that Issue Paper I on Housing has been completed and given to the Planning Board. Public meetings are going to be scheduled to talk about the issue papers. Any comments should go to the Planning Office and will be discussed at the next Planning Board meeting.

Russell questioned the Table I on page 3 of the Housing Issue Paper and the figures showing the annual household income needed to afford median home values. Harris stated that the 3 to 1 rule was used; meaning that the cost of the house should be three times the annual income in order to be affordable. He added that this is a big issue in Flathead County and there is a range of actions within the paper to deal with affordable housing. Harris added that they are trying to find out how the public feels about the housing issue. He realizes prices are increasing and it is difficult for some people to get into housing. By the next Task Force meeting he will have more issue papers, to include Community Character, Natural Resources, and Growth Management.

Harris stressed that they are looking for public involvement and public comment. This is a very fluid document and will continue to be fine-tuned until the growth policy is done. He wants as much public input and buy-in as possible. They are currently compiling a list of names for a Speakers Bureau. A standardized message will be put together so this information can be put to the public. He wants community leaders to present this standardized message. A list of civic groups is being compiled and he needs volunteers to become a part of this Speakers Bureau.

Harris added that they are developing a master schedule of public meetings and putting together a map showing housing densities for 1990, 2000, and annual maps

for 2000 through 2005. This is difficult because there are no county building permits required. They will be relying on other sources of information to develop these maps.

A listening post to be set up for those people who don't want to speak but can write in comments. Information will be put in the schools and flyers are going out with public notices related to zoning and land-use actions.

Nix noted that the county has a software program to assist in developing the build-out maps. Harris stated that he is using this information but they need to consider the need for technical support. He has a person on staff who will learn more about this software program. He is also talking to the County GIS Department to get a standardized format for public presentation.

The County Commissioners have also allowed funds for transportation and he is working with Charlie Johnson to determine how to spend this money. An RFP has been drafted and will be sent out in hopes that they find a qualified firm to assist with this.

Nix asked if Harris was using the current regulations to do the build-out maps. Nix felt that new trends will be different because of changes in the subdivision regulations and the new growth being proposed. They need to determine how to map, taking into consideration those areas that they will be receiving applications on now or in the future.

Harris responded that they don't have all of the base data to do a good build out because the information isn't there. This will be done with several tools, to include zoning information, preliminary and final plats in unzoned areas, and they will have to make assumptions about those unzoned areas. They don't have enough good information available to them to work with. They will have to use existing information to do this build out and then amend this information in the future once revisions are made.

Nix stated that he would like to see the base line transportation information as soon as possible. Harris stated that they have the information as to number of trips per day and road classifications. They are looking at a transportation corridor study to identify transportation corridors that are reasonable and make sense. These corridors need to be put on a map and classified. They want to standardize the road classifications and he will rely on the Road Department to assist with this. As soon as the corridors are defined and mapped, the corridor roads will be tied together from large areas right down to site specific areas. This will allow subdivisions to plan ahead and determine where the roads will be.

Nix stated that the Transportation Committee has started with some mapping and suggested that Harris attend these meetings. Nix added that they need to address the need for linking together roads in small subdivisions as well as larger subdivisions, and they need to set a policy to address this. Russell pointed out that the GIS Department has a lot of information that can be used in this process.

Discussion turned to road standards and the existing 80' right of way required by the Department of Transportation. The Two Rivers proposal included a 120' right of way to facilitate bike paths. Harris stated that the Planning Board is also looking at the 120' requirement to allow bike paths within these rights of way. He is not sure what the width requirement will be in a re-write of the subdivision regulations. They want the consultant to work with the Transportation Committee when hired.

Nix stated that the cities and the state are able to acquire right of way but the statute doesn't allow the county to own right of way, they just have an easement. He would like to lobby the legislation to allow ownership of this right of way for the county, rather than just easement rights. Johnson stressed his concern about bike paths within the county right of way because maintenance is a concern.

Shaw noted that the aerial photography is good and the GIS Department can assist in developing some of these maps based on the information they have in their system. Harris agreed that the information is there, but it would take time and money to extract that information and compile it for their use. Nix added that they have purchased some maps from GIS to assist with bike paths, etc.

Patrick stated that the City of Kalispell had a TAC meeting today to talk about their transportation growth policy. Kalispell has received \$75,000 and the State is adding \$75,000 to do a transportation plan in and around Kalispell. The north boundary will be Church Drive, the West boundary will be Farm to Market and the south boundary will go to Rocky Cliff. These areas are already going to be reviewed through the Kalispell plan and this information can be used for the county's planning process. Coughlin reported that Whitefish is looking at doing the same thing.

Nix stated that a recommendation has been made for the county to hire a grant writer. There is so much money available if they had somebody to pursue the grants. Pence stated that the county has set aside money for contracted grant writers. Patrick stated that all the county needs to do is commit to allocate funds for a transportation study. There is money available from the State, it's just a matter of coming up with matching funds. Pence noted that the county is waiting for this process. They are also looking at impact fees and RSID projects.

Nix stated that a base line study is necessary for impact fees. It will be nine months or more before these fees could even be considered. He asked if it was possible to go to the public for donations. Pence stated that he met with a group of community leaders about promoting the growth policy and selling it to the public. There is a concern about a conflict of interest when money comes from the private sector. The public perception could be that of self-interest if private money is used and private people are "selling" the policy. This would also be the case if other entities were to contribute, such as public utilities, etc.

Harris agreed that the public perception is a great concern. He has asked business leaders to sponsor public meetings by providing support staff do conduct the public meetings. Community leaders are now engaging and supporting the public input. By doing this, they are not buying into the document; they are not buying into the process.

Nix again stressed his frustration with lack of funding to meet the needs of construction, improvement and maintenance of roads. Harris stated that the planning is being done. Implementation is another subject. Pence added that the County Commissioners are working toward impact fees and they are working with other counties to find out what is happening in these other counties. The Commissioners intend to eventually hire a consultant to put an impact fee schedule together. There is no authorization at this time but he is sure that in the near future things will proceed in that direction.

Coughlin stated that she would like to see a local option real estate transfer tax that would be required if a sale takes place within a certain period of time, say 5 to 7 years. This way the longterm landowner would not be affected. It was noted that a local option tax has to be passed at the state level and then would have to be passed at a local level.

Nix stated that a transfer tax is being discussed in Bigfork. He would like to see this passed at the state level. It will require money to implement this once the plan is done. He believes there is money in the county that they should be able to find some people and groups that could donate without causing a conflict of interest.

Pence noted that with the current subdivision development in the county, there are three miles of road constructed per year. There is 700 miles of gravel road in the county right now. Harris stated that they are reviewing the current road standards right now and looking at changes in the subdivision regulations. They need to be careful, however, when requiring improvements on off-site property such as private access roads to the subdivision.

Johnson stressed his frustration of the continual talk of impact fees, RSIDs, maintenance districts and the fact that this talk does not solve his current problem with roads. It will take several things to address the road issues and they will need to use all of the tools available all of the time to get on top of the situation. Shaw agreed, noting that impact fees will only apply to new subdivisions and won't affect other problem areas. In addition, there is a potential cost to cities and county when impact fees are implemented.

Neighborhood Plans

Nix stated that Bigfork is concerned about their plan not being implemented into the growth policy. The growth policy needs to be the prominent document and neighborhood plans need to link to that document. All of the existing neighborhood plans have been developed by the people and they feel very strongly that these plans be implemented into the growth policy.

Harris stated that the communities were instructed that they develop a plan and comply with the growth policy. All plans need to be consistent with the policy and if a plans are not consistent, the county will not accept them. He is trying to get word out to let the neighborhoods know this. If the neighborhoods don't develop their own plan, the county will go out and develop the plan.

Harris stressed that the plans must be consistent with the growth policy. There must be uniformity in these plans throughout the county and they need to standardize classifications. A vision must be defined; the plans need to identify what matters, what characteristics need protected, what opportunities are there today. The plans also need to identify land forms, paths, easements, scenic areas, etc. Harris added that Bigfork has a great planning process going on right now with a lot of public involvement. He wants to work with them but Bigfork needs to understand what will be required.

Nix asked about the other existing plans and questioned Harris why he can't examine those plans to determine what needs to be done so they can be included in the growth policy. Harris stated that most of the existing plans are a combination of planning and zoning. These plans will not be included in the first phase. He can't tell them what is required until the county has something to compare these plans against, which is the growth policy. The growth policy is not yet completed.

Harris added that most of the plans being brought to them are based on land ownership. These plans are not comprehensive community-based plans. Two Rivers is a good example. If this area is defined, with the help of the public, they will use the Two Rivers as a base line and try to keep the integrity of the plan. But they need to fill in the gaps and make it a community plan.

Nix asked how long it will take the planning office to develop each plan. Harris answered that this is difficult to determine because each plan is based on neighborhood involvement. He agreed that six months to one year is reasonable. Harris added that it could take six years to re-review the existing neighborhood plans. This timeframe does not include any new plans or plans being proposed right now.

Nix stated that he is concerned about the neighborhood efforts that were involved in developing the existing plans, which will now have to possibly be amended by the county. He is concerned about the "neighborhood effort" being destroyed by this review. He asked how they address this so the communities don't feel like their efforts were wasted. It is important to continue their involvement in the review process. Shaw noted that nothing can be done with these existing plans until the growth policy is completed. It is possible that some of the neighborhood plans are going to be in compliance with the growth policy. They need to wait until the growth policy is finished.

Harris stated that the Bigfork plan overlays zoning that conforms to the plan. All proposals go to the Bigfork Planning Committee for review. That process is in place today and that process won't go away next October. If there is no plan, it won't stop the existing process, it will only stop any zoning proposals.

Nix stated that Bigfork is looking to the county to uphold the status of their plan and they want to be included in the county plan. Harris noted that the growth policy is a framework document and won't supersede any existing plan. A lot of time will be required to address the site-specific plans already in place. He wants to design planning areas in the growth policy in hopes that they get to those areas within a five-

year period. Harris was asked how he plans to fit in new plans during this five-year period. Harris responded that it is possible that new proposed plans might be nested within larger areas where plans have already been established. He stressed that he doesn't want to leave any areas unplanned and this will require neighborhood input. His goal is to review existing plans and new proposals in this five-year period.

Nix asked if information could be made available to the communities to offer guidance as to what will be required when developing or reviewing the plans. Something like this could free up the planning staff and allow the private sector to do the process. Harris agreed that this is an option, but not something his office would administer. He is looking at community based planning rather than small landowner efforts. He would rather go out and develop those plan areas than be driven by landownership. If the county is going to adopt these plans, the county should be the ones initiating the plans.

Harris stated that there is no tool to measure the plans without a growth policy in place. Two Rivers is a good concept, but it is landowner driven not county driven and they need to fill in some gaps. Harris added that other plans are just zoning tools and they need to draw the line between a plan and a zoning tool. Each plan will require individual review.

Public Comment

Mayre Flowers stated that she appreciates the efforts by this Task Force to reach out to the public for input, but there needs to be a better way to get the information out to the public. She suggested that a calendar of meetings be published, as the media is not getting this information out.

Flowers added that there is more discussion on the implementation strategy being proposed. She realizes this is a work in process, but there needs to be more public outreach. She is very concerned about using a public focus group process to identify the implementation strategy. She doesn't want this process to turn political; it needs to remain a public broad-based process.

Doug Averill stated that Bigfork has been working for a year or more on their plan. They understand that the county needs to get as much information in order to incorporate their plan into the growth policy. Now they are being told that the growth policy needs to be established first before any neighborhood plans will be accepted. Averill stated that Bigfork has been working on this process for over a year, they have raised money for the process, and they have hired a professional land person for the process. They now risk the possibility of the plan not being accepted.

Averill is concerned about the county creating a growth policy that the Bigfork community won't buy into. Bigfork has supported the planning process all the way back to 1992 and they are trying to follow that same process again. They intend to come to the county with a near unanimous support of the plan. Bigfork needs to know how the plan will merge into the county plan so their process isn't wasted.

Baum stated that within the county there is some State right-of-way that is unused. He asked about an existing law that allows these unused rights of way to be permitted or leased to private enterprise. He asked if this factors in to the transportation plan. Discussion was held as to the law Baum was referring to.

The dates, times and locations of the committee meetings were noted. The Transportation Committee meets the 1st and 3rd Thursdays from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Sewer/Water Committee meets the second Thursday at 2:30 p.m. The Education Outreach Committee meets the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays at 11:30 a.m. The Affordable Housing Committee meets the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays at 11:30 a.m. The Zoning Committee meets the 1st Thursday at 12:00 p.m. The information for the Parks Committee, the Bike Path Committee and the Police, Fire & EMS Committee will be available at the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.